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REMARKS

OF

C. P. HUNTINGTON,

AT THE

HAMPTON NORMAL AND AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTE,

HAMPTON, VA., JANUARY 1, 1900,

ON

"THE FUTURE OF THE NEGRO."

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ADDRESS.

I have been asked by your Principal, Dr. Frissell, to say a few words to you. I told him that I did not know just what to say—not because there was so little to say, but because there was so much that I did not know where to begin. The negro race is as old as the oldest, and through the ages has had its great men, but for the last two thousand years or more it has been at a disadvantage compared with the Caucasian race, as the negro has been off the line of commerce, and commerce has always been king. The vast trade between eastern Asia and western Europe has been done north of Africa. The great caravans carried this commerce for many centuries, enriching the countries through which it passed. Great cities were built along this line, and built just because of this trade. Africa was, as I have said, off its line, excepting along the south shore of the Mediterranean, where the negro race became mixed with the other races, and for this reason our histories of ancient times are deplorably silent concerning the great characters and the great deeds which, had they been in the light at that time, would no doubt have distinguished and made bright the pages of negro history. There were then, beyond question, master minds among the negro race, and there have been many since, as I have found their names running through all the later centuries ; but the time at my disposal is too short to allow of anything more than the merest reference to them, and it is difficult to get at the true narrative of their lives and times, as the peoples of the Caucasian race have done the negro much wrong, and, that being so, it was to be expected that they would falsify history rather than let it show how bad they themselves had been. When a man does another a willful injustice, it eases

his conscience to show that the victim deserved all he got. Just so the Caucasians have undoubtedly suppressed facts and twisted history to show that the negroes got their deserts when they were taken and held as slaves, and no doubt the white men rested all the better after convincing themselves that they had done the right thing.

Yet the influence of the negro away back in the dim past was certainly felt, and a curious illustration of it was found not many years ago in excavating one of the ancient cities on the Upper Nile. Hieroglyphics were discovered, of a date something more than a thousand years before Christ, which, being deciphered, told the story of how one of the potentates of ancient Babylon sent to Ethiopia to ask the king of that country to send him a princess for his wife, but no princess would consent to go. Then the Babylonish monarch asked that a beautiful woman should be sent and *called* a "princess." It is not known to me whether a princess was sent or not, but presumably one was, and, at any rate, it would seem from this that negro maidens must have been highly prized at that time. In the Matabeles and the Zulus of the present age we find leaders of the strongest character; men able to well maintain themselves, not alone among their own people, but among the nations with whom they have come in contact.

Slavery, as we know, has existed in all ages, and both white and black men have been bought and sold as chattels. Indeed, I have not a doubt in my mind that, if the officers of the law would not interfere, a slave ship would be put into New York Harbor and a thousand human beings would be offered for sale every thirty days, on the offer of a hundred dollars for each one of them, and it would not matter whether the call was for whites or blacks. With the same opportunities and immunities all races, I believe, would be about the same. About 525 B. C., Cambyses, king of the Persians, who meditated an attack on Ethiopia, sent men in the guise of gift-bearers to spy out the land, and, on being

brought to the Ethiopian court, the messengers said to the king : " Cambyses, King of the Persians, desirous of becoming your friend and ally, has sent us, bidding us confer with you, and he presents you with these gifts, which are such as he himself most delights in."

The Ethiopian monarch was not deceived, and he answered : " Neither has the King of the Persians sent you with presents to me because he valued my alliance, nor do you speak the truth, for you come as spies to my kingdom. Nor is he a just man ; for, if he was, he would not desire any other territory than his own ; nor would he, if he could, reduce into servitude people who have done him no injury. However," continued the African King, taking up a mighty Ethiopian bow, " give him this bow, and say these words to him : ' The King of the Ethiopians advises the King of the Persians that when the Persians can thus easily draw a bow of this size'—and he drew it, without difficulty—'then to make war on the Ethiopians, with more numerous forces ; but until that time let him thank the gods, who have not inspired the sons of the Ethiopians with the desire of adding another land to their own.' " Having said this, he unstrung the bow and delivered it to the spies. It is interesting to add that the haughty Cambyses, who was regarded as the most powerful monarch of his time, was so enraged at this answer that he sent a vast army to the attack, and not only failed in his attempt, but lost a large part of his army.

Probably the noblest and wisest of the men whose names appear in African history was François Dominique Toussaint, called Toussant L'Ouverture.

Toussaint was a full-blooded negro ; a slave, and the son of slaves, though descended from an African prince. As a slave, we are told that he was amiable, patient, mild and of a benevolent disposition, and that his goodness of heart and purity of character won him many friends, both black and white, and that they trusted him implicitly. He acquired a great influence over the

people of his blood, and—without taking up the time to tell you his history, which very likely you have read—I will say that he entered the army in Haiti, rose to be second in command, and fought with such bravery and coolness that in a short time the French Government there made him commander-in-chief of the native forces. He drove out the Spanish, and the British general surrendered to him all the strong places which the English had held on the island. Until 1801 Toussaint was supreme chief, and his rule was vigorous and upright. Agriculture and trade flourished under him, for he was wise as well as just, and the people enjoyed peace and happiness. Then came in Napoleon, who wanted no rivals in greatness, and wished to re-establish slavery, which had been abolished on the island. Toussaint declared the independence of the island, and established a system of free labor. Napoleon sent an army of 30,000 men, with 66 ships, to reduce Toussaint to subjection, and a long and bloody struggle began, until peace was declared, with Toussaint in supreme control. Then came the dastardly trick of the white man, when Toussaint was stealthily seized on his own plantation, to which he had retired, and transported to France, cast into a dungeon from which he never came out; but he had not lived in vain, and his devoted followers in the war which broke out afresh fought desperately until the French army finally surrendered and France lost forever the greatest of her West Indian colonies. But Toussaint L'Ouverture should have the credit of establishing freedom in Haiti; and there is no doubt in my mind that he was one of the wisest, noblest and best characters that lived in his generation.

In the last two thousand years I think the negro has never come so near the front line of civilization as he is to-day, and never before had so fair a field for an onward march. Hardly a generation has passed since one of the greatest wars known in any age was fought over the question whether the negro in this country should be bond or free; and in that war what did the

negroes do? Almost invariably they stayed with their masters and did for them and theirs all they could, as they had been doing in the past. This was not only humane—it was wise; but I think in doing it they builded better than they knew, for the negroes since then have never had any friends like their ex-masters and mistresses. I consider the great South as the negro's best possible home of the future, and there I think you should, in the main, stay; for there I think is your best chance in the gradual working out of your salvation. There is less prejudice against you there than in the North; at the same time let me say that you have as good friends in the North as you have anywhere else in the world; but the North does not understand you as do the people of your own South, who still have prejudices; but those prejudices will some time pass away. It may be a long time, but you can make it the shortest possible time by your own endeavors; by not encroaching upon or attempting too suddenly to pass across the line of demarkation as the Caucasians have fixed it. As a rule I would suggest that you keep away from the polls until they ask you to come and vote; and I would urge you even more strongly to keep out of politics. You can live under any government that the white man can in this country.

As to social equality—it is a myth. There are many grades of society in every race, and some of the worst are in the so-called highest. A man may work at digging ditches and be a gentleman, while the man for whom he is doing the work may be far from one. Social equality cannot be arranged by legislation. "Birds of a feather flock together;" many kinds may live in the same woods in harmony, but never mating.

My negro friends, let me speak plainly to you, as I do to all, if I speak at all. Whatever you do in life, do it with an honesty of purpose. We all know the Golden Rule. Let us follow it as closely as we can. It is the aggregation of little things that makes the great ones. We can all do little things and do them

well, if we will. One is sure to rise if he works his way up step by step, and he is as sure to fall if he commences at the top, as it is necessary that he should have the experience one gets in working his way up in order to maintain himself at the higher level when he shall have reached it.

A young man—or boy, you may say—once wrote to me from the country that he would like to have me get him a position as clerk in a store. I wrote him to come down at any time and I would find a place for him. He wrote me that he did not like to come down until the place had been secured; but I told him not to wait for that; so he came. The next morning after he arrived in New York I took him to a large jobbing house and told the principal man there that I had brought down from the country a boy who wanted a place to work. “What position do you want for him?” I was asked. I replied that what I would like would be to have the young man made assistant to the chief porter—it was a large business concern. The principal said that he could, of course, give him that kind of position; but the young man, who was with me, called me to one side and told me he could do better for himself than to take such a place, as he had been clerk in a country store a year. “Never mind that,” said I. “Your being in a country store won’t help you. You just take the place I have gotten for you and do the work better than it has ever been done before.” He was not pleased, but he took my advice and started in at wages of about five dollars a week, and I have no doubt he did his very best, for he was advanced several times in the course of the year, mastering each new work as he took it up. When he had been there something less than a year he came to me and told me that he had received a proposition for three years at a thousand dollars for the first year, twelve hundred and fifty for the second, and fifteen hundred dollars for the third. I told him that was very nice, but not to commit himself for any such length of time, as I believed there was something better and higher for him to do, and that he

would soon be able to do it ; but meanwhile to keep right along as he was, doing the work they gave him to do.

Before two years had elapsed he found a better position for himself elsewhere, and he achieved it by learning the lesson of beginning at the bottom and working up. He took up the new work in the same spirit with which he began the old—with the determination to master the work and do it better than anybody else had done it ; and he has been steadily going forward year by year, never idle, always progressing, until to-day he is worth about two millions of dollars of money honestly earned, though, of course, not all earned by mere manual labor, but in the building up of institutions and enterprises that were of value not only to himself but to his country.

Now, in the above case, if the boy had gotten at first what he then wanted—some position amongst experts—he would not have done himself credit, and very likely he would to-day be helping the porter. In short, it is the difference between starting at the bottom and working up, as against beginning at the top and working down. What the people of this country ought to learn is how to live. They need little, but they want much ; hence they buy luxuries which they do not need, and starve for the things they do need. Many people buy just to show their neighbors that they can, failing to see that the time will come when their neighbors will see that it was all a sham ; whereas, if they would get simply the necessaries, the day would almost surely come when they could stop work in their declining days and enjoy to the full the fruits of their wisdom, instead of becoming a burden upon their children or their relations or the world at large.

Our schools teach everybody a little of almost everything ; but, in my opinion, they teach very few children just what they ought to know in order to make their way successfully in life. They do not put into their hands the tools they are best fitted to use, and hence so many failures. Many a mother and sister have

worked and slaved, living upon scanty food, in order to give a son and brother a "liberal education," and in doing this they built up a barrier between the boy and the work he was fitted to do. The young negro of this country has no such barrier to overcome, because he has the advantage of his Caucasian neighbor in not having to start out in life with the obstacle of a senseless pride between him and his work. In other words, he has none of this foolish pride, but can take the work that lies nearest to him. Let me say to you that all honest work is honorable work, and, if the labor is manual and seems common and below your capacity, you will have all the more chance to be thinking of other things or of work that is higher and brings better pay, and to work out in your minds better and higher duties and responsibilities for yourselves, and can be thinking of ways by which you can help others as well as yourselves, and bring them up to your higher level.

It is the doing of kindnesses for others that adds so much to one's personal happiness; a smile and a kind word with those who are happy, a tear for those in sorrow, bread for those who cannot get work and are hungry, cost but little, and mean so much to those who receive. The amount of money that you can give is limited, and the giving of it is often more harmful than helpful; but kind words and sympathy cost nothing, and the more you give, the more do you have to give.

I remember once a boy who came into my office looking for work—I am always interested in boys who want work. I turned and saw a handsome and very pleasant-faced boy of strong physique. I told him I had not at that time anything for him to do, which I regretted. As he was about to leave he asked me if I would not give him half a dollar to get his breakfast with. Maybe I ought to have given him the money, but at the moment it seemed to me not, for he was too nice-looking a boy, too strong a boy, to ask or receive charity, and I told him so. "Now," said I, "as I was coming downtown this morning I saw some men lay-

ing paving-blocks in Centre Street. You go up there and ask the foreman to give you work until you have earned three cents, and tell him you will leave it to him to say when you have done work enough to earn that sum. You have a pleasant face, and I think he will set you to work." Then I asked the boy if he had not some relative in the city, some old aunt to whom he could go and get a crust of bread. "No," he said. He had come down from the country, and began telling who his folks were, but I stopped him. "Never mind that," said I. "If you have not got anybody to give you anything to eat, your chances are good." I told him when he had earned the three cents to go and buy a couple of penny rolls, which, with a glass of water, would make him a breakfast, and a breakfast which, having been honestly earned, would be better for him than any meal he could possibly get out of money earned by someone else. Then I said to him that after he had had his breakfast to look about him, and if he could see a man with a load of coal, ask him where he was taking it; then to follow him and get the job of putting it in its place. "In short," said I, "take any work you can get, and when you have earned a little money never allow yourself to get out of money; and it will take but little of the money that is earned to buy all one needs."

He went out of my office, and about three years afterward I met him on the street and he spoke to me and recalled himself to my recollection, as I had not recognized him. Said he: "I was the boy you told how to get his first money," and he went on to tell me how he did get a load of coal to put in and carried a ton of it up three flights of stairs, getting an empty soap box at a corner grocery to carry the coal in, and received seventy-five cents for that job. Said he finally: "I have not been out of work or money since, and to-day I have got a good place as porter in a store; and some time I will have a store of my own, and when I do, I shall come to you and ask you to look at it." I have not heard from that boy since, but if he lives I expect that he will

show me his store. Whether he does or not, he has learned the lesson of economical living, and it is the lesson, rather than the sequel, that I want all of you to absorb and remember.

I have told you a rather long story, and now I am nearly through. I wish you, one and all, success in the years opening before you, and I hope you will start right here in the grand old State of Virginia to do what good you can in the world. I would like to see you start a school, a club, or order, to teach the people of your race how to live, for I am confident that the work of such a school would prove of surprising benefit. But the rules or laws of such an organization, defining the duties of its members, should be so clearly set forth that they would stand against the world's efforts to cross the line between the right and the wrong. It is not hard to stop one just at the parting of the ways, but when one has stepped across the line there is no fixed halting place, and the course is then ever downward, from bad to worse, until the worst is reached. It then becomes doubly hard for one to retrace his steps; but just at the line between the right and the wrong, just on the verge of the good and the bad, all men hesitate, if sometimes only for a moment; for no one likes to cross the fatal line, and few will if there is some good friend to step forward at the moment of doubt and struggle and ask them to pause and stand on the side of the right. Threats and orders harshly given will stop no one, or at best but few; but let the friend speak kindly, let him but shed a tear—no man could do less or more—and, if need be, point in silence the other way; then I know few, if any, will resist the gentle influence and be saved. Why cannot you, my friends of the negro race, organize an order here in the good old State of Virginia, with the noble aim to teach your people how to live, what to drink, what to wear, and what to do? Most of you know all this now. Teach those who do not. It is so easy to do, if done in the right way; and there is but one right way—through kindly words and deeds. Teach your people how much joy

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they will have in seeing their families neatly clad and well fed, and that, though their wages be small, yet if they will buy only what they need they will have something left over that they can give to some sick and suffering one who needs their aid; and they will find so much pleasure in the giving that they will ever watch out for others whose misfortunes have brought them low. Teach your people the blessed lessons of economy and temperance in all things. Show them by precept and example how a little money saved up steadily day by day and month by month out of the yearly income will in the end reach a sum which can be invested and ever after be a servant to earn more and more money without their working for it; and, as one becomes an actual property owner, he becomes a better and better citizen. He finds himself taking more and more interest in law and order, in the institutions of his country, in the advancement of his fellow citizens; and he will find, too, that his neighbors are respecting him more and more; they are finding that they have a good citizen in their midst, a man of property and responsibility, who is worthy of a high place in their esteem and affection; a man of public spirit, who is not only willing, but able, to be a help in civic affairs. In short, he is a man among men and an equal of the best. I wish my words could reach all young men of all races who are starting in life all over this country. Your race is to a certain extent handicapped by its surroundings and by prejudice of many years' growth; but it is for the Negroes themselves to say if they shall tamely submit to circumstances and take the easiest beginning only to suffer the hardest ending, or if they shall rise superior to their environment and become what I hope you all have the proud ambition to be—true American citizens.

If you could found an order or association of the kind I have outlined, with its foundations so deep and so broad, and worked on such lines of kindness and charity, that its influence would be felt around the world, all prejudice against your race would soon

pass away and you would be amongst the most favored of God's beings, as I believe you were when humanity was young.

Let me again impress upon you the simple rules that it is necessary for you to know if you would have any chance to succeed in life. Remember that all honest work is honorable work. Buy only what you need, and spend as little money as you must. Don't waste your time either when at work or when away from work, for it is what one does with his wages and his time after his day's work is over that largely determines his future.

I wish you could all see the future as I see it; or perhaps I should say, that you could see the past as I have seen it; as the same principles or rules that have been will continue to be and the fittest will continue to survive. O my friends of the negro race! the rules that bring success are so few, so easily learned, so easily followed, that no one need fail; for the field is wide and there will be no shadows over those who do their best and take counsel from within; for all know the right. Why cannot you—each of you—pledge yourself to work continuously to raise yourself and others less fortunate to the highest level ever reached by man? You have nearly all the requisites for doing this work, and what you have not you can easily get by continuing thought and work. Then, there is so much pleasure in the doing, as it must all be done by acts of kindness. No man or woman was ever made better by harsh words. Use only kindly words, smiling upon those who do well, praising them for their virtues, passing by their little faults, if you can, and soon they will have none; for every one will try to fill the niche that you place him in. The field is wide, and has less obstructions for you now than there have been before in the last thousand years. Press forward to gain the highest level that has ever been reached by man, and cry: "Eureka! The fittest have survived; we have won the race!"



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